

Lesson 4 – Opening Bids at 2, 3 and 4 Level Fewer than 12 Points

Sometimes you can open the bidding with under 12 points. If you have 12 points or more, the previous lessons apply.



“Weak Two” Bids:

If you have between 6-11 points, you can open the bidding as follows:

With a 6-card spade suit, including two of the top three cards in that suit (Ace, King, Queen of spades), open with **2♠**.

With a 6-card heart suit, including two of the top three cards in that suit (Ace, King, Queen of hearts), open with **2♥**.

With a 6-card diamond suit, including two of the top three cards in that suit (Ace, King, Queen of diamonds), open with **2♦**.

Remember: 2♣ as an opening bid is an artificial bid meaning 22+ points.

Therefore, you cannot use an opening bid of **2♣** to show a “weak two” bid with a 6-card club suit as you can with the other suits. If you have 12 points and 6 clubs, open **1♣**. If you have fewer than 12 points, even with a good 6-card suit in clubs, you should pass in the first round. You can overcall **2♣** after one of the opponents bid, however. Partner will know you do not have opening points because you passed in the first round.

“Pre-Emptive Three and Four” Bids:

If you have between 6-11 points, you can open the bidding as follows:

With a 7- or 8-card spade suit, including two of the top three cards in that suit (Ace, King, Queen of spades), open with **3♠ or 4♠**.

With a 7- or 8-card heart suit, including two of the top three cards in that suit (Ace, King, Queen of hearts), open with **3♥ or 4♥**.

With a 7- or 8-card diamond suit, including two of the top three cards in that suit (Ace, King, Queen of diamonds), open with **3♦ or 4♦**.

With a 7- or 8-card club suit, including two of the top three cards in that suit (Ace, King, Queen of clubs), open with **3♣ or 4♣**.

Note: The purpose of opening with a weak or pre-emptive bid is to take the contract away from the opponents and/or make it difficult for them. For example, an opening bid of **2♠** can wreak havoc with their bidding as they now have to overcall at the 3 Level if they wish to enter the bidding. It is important to keep in mind that opening with a weak bid can be a double-edged sword. It has advantages and disadvantages. For example, while you may be making it difficult for the opponents to bid, at the same time, you may be making it difficult for your partner to bid. If I am considering opening with a weak minor but I have a 3+ card major (therefore, I can respond to my partner’s opening bid in that major), I will usually pass and wait to see if my partner opens the bidding. A fit in a major suit is much better than a contract in a minor suit

and, if you open weak in a minor, it may be difficult to find your major suit fit. If, after passing, your partner does not bid, but opponents do, then you may still have the opportunity to bid your weak hand at the 2+ level. Your partner will know you that you do not have opening points because you passed in the first round.

Responding to Weak Two and Pre-emptive Bids:

Here are some guidelines: Because these weak opening bids are showing anywhere from 6-11 points, it is sometimes difficult to know how many points the partnership has in total. Opener could have as low as 6 points, though often it will be around 10. If Responder has 16+ points, they could have game in a major or NT. With fewer than 15 points, it is unlikely that game is there and a partscore may be all that is attainable, so Responder will need to use judgment on whether to respond to a weak opening.

Much of Responder's judgment has to do with how many trump cards you have together in that suit. These weak opening bids tell you **exactly** the number of cards in the suit bid; therefore, as responder, you can easily count how many trump cards you have together.

If you know that together you have a fit in that suit (8+ cards) but you have fewer than 12 points, you would usually pass, unless the opponents try to take the contract away.

Sometimes you may be trying to thwart the opponents and prevent them from bidding to game so then it is recommended to bid as high as the total number of trumps in your combined hands. This is called "**The Law of Total Tricks.**" With 9 trump total, bid as high as the 3 level. With 10 trump total, bid as high as the 4 level. These examples apply if you have fewer than 15 points.

Example 1: Your partner opened with **2♥** (6 hearts, weak bid). You have 3 hearts in your hand. You have 9 hearts together; therefore, estimate 9 tricks.

Your bid: **Pass**, unless opponents bid. If they bid, raise as high as **3♥** (9 tricks).

Example 2: Your partner opened **2♠**. (6 spades, weak hand). You have 4 spades (together you have 10 spades). Estimate 10 tricks.

Your bid: **Pass**, unless opponents bid. If they bid, raise as high as **4♠**. (10 tricks).

Example 3: Your partner opened **4♠** (8 or 9 spades, weak hand). You have 2 spades. Together you have at least 10 spades. **Pass.** (You have already reached game level; no need to go any higher.)

If your partner opened with a weak hand and your hand is also very weak, you can conclude that the opponents have most of the points and will want to compete for the contract. Some players have the attitude that: "The weaker you are, the higher you jump." But that's only if you have a long suit. Sometimes it's better to go down one or two tricks than let your opponents bid to game and make the contract. Vulnerability is also a consideration. As a beginner, it's best to be cautious. You can also be doubled for penalty and you may have to learn that the hard way!

If in doubt, when partner opens with a weak hand, it's usually best for Responder to pass with fewer than 15 points unless you can apply "The Law of Total Tricks." If Responder has a very strong hand, Game or even Slam may be there, especially if the partnership holds lots of trump. With more bidding and playing experience, these judgments will be easier to make.